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Audit of housing policy in rural areas



Key external stakeholders:

Policy makers, Local Development Companies (LEADER), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Department of Social Protection, Department of Environment and Local Government.

Practical implications for stakeholders:

- This research provides critical insights to policy makers in relation to planning for rural housing
- The project clarifies for rural social housing providers and funders, mismatches between rural social housing demand and supply
- Through methodological advances, the project shows how existing vital data on rural house building can be optimised for policy analysis purposes.
- The project provides, for the first time, research findings on many previously unexplored rural housing issues in an Irish context.
- Findings on LEADER focused research could contribute towards mid and end term evaluations

Main results:

- Conceptualisations of innovation and displacement used in LEADER companies' evaluation forms for enterprise funding, could be considered contradictory. If a traditional view of displacement is taken, innovative enterprises might be refused funding.
- The analysis raises the possibility that a more strategic interpretation of the displacement rule by LEADER might be appropriate if stimulating an innovation outcome is the goal of LEADER policy towards enterprise.
- The research undertaken as part of this study crosses a number of policy areas that impacts on rural housing policy. This highlights critical issues in terms of the mismatch between housing supply and demand for rural social housing providers and funders.

Opportunity / Benefits:

A range of new analysis is available to policy makers concerned with a number of key rural development issues including innovation and development, land use and community development.

Collaborating Institutions:

NUI Galway; Castlebar IT; QUB

Project team:

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External Collaborators:

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1. Project background:

The aim of this project was to assess the impact of selected critical policies on rural areas. Initially the project focused on how various aspects of housing policy impacted on rural areas. For the final eighteen months of the project, the project focused on enterprise policy and innovation in rural areas, specifically focusing on the LEADER programme.

2. Questions addressed by the project:

1. What are the housing issues that are not adequately addressed in the Irish literature on housing in rural areas?
2. How are new methodologies being applied to identify the spatial aspects of Irish rural housing?
3. Do the criteria used by LEADER in evaluating applications for funding by rural enterprises ensure the maximum contribution from such enterprises to rural economic development?

3. The experimental studies:

Drawing on a multidisciplinary team of internal and external collaborators, a variety of methods were employed to answer individual research questions. The methods included statistical analysis, GIS, sociological analysis, case studies, interviews and legislative reviews.

4. Main results:

There were seven main pieces of analysis carried out in relation to rural housing.

1. The first, provided an overview of the state of the art in rural housing research both internationally and in Ireland is outlined. This identified a lack of Irish research on rural social housing, rural homelessness, rural second homes and estate management in rural towns and villages.
2. The second, written from a legal perspective, focused on the impact of housing rights on Irish rural housing issues. It found that policymakers have been hindered from integrating the plethora of housing rights norms and standards which Ireland has signed up to, largely from lack of awareness of these obligations and the Constitutional barriers to their domestic enforcement in some cases.
3. The third, informed by a planning perspective, examined the factors that have influenced planning policy at national and local level in Ireland over recent decades. It concludes that the opportunity to plan strategically for rural places has not been grasped, although the framework for a national to local level planning system to facilitate such strategic planning existed. The introduction of national rural housing guidelines perpetuated this failure.
4. The fourth, inspired by an economic perspective, reviews the demand for, and supply of, social housing in rural areas. This identified that the provision of social housing in rural areas does not directly correlate with the level of need.
5. The fifth, combines GIS methodology and aerial photography to identify the exact pattern of housing development in rural county Galway over the period 1995-2008. By combining these two methods, this research shows how the shortcoming of the An Post Geo-Directory (a construction date for each building) can be overcome. If developed further, this tool will be invaluable to policy makers and researchers interested in using it to identify spatial aspects of residential and commercial development, economic geography and the distribution of various types of buildings in Ireland over time.

6. The sixth, written from a social geography perspective, explores the process underpinning estate management in private housing estates on the edges of town and villages. It concludes that rather than providing opportunities for including residents in management functions, the tendency has been to create barriers to participation, with attendant negative consequences for the development of social capital and wider norms of civic engagement.
7. The seventh, drawing on sociology and using holiday homes in rural areas as the context, examines the type of interaction between local and 'outsider' through the nexus of social and cultural activities. Comparing the situations in rural Ireland and France, this analysis shows that local attitudes towards the development of the village, norms of extending houses rather than building new ones, and integration of local people with outsiders all contribute to the form of development that takes place in these rural areas.

There was one main piece of research carried out in relation to rural enterprise, innovation and the LEADER Programme.

- This analysis showed that the conceptualisations of innovation and displacement used in LEADER companies' evaluation forms for enterprise funding, could be considered contradictory. If a traditional view of displacement is taken, innovative enterprises might be refused funding. The analysis raises the possibility that a more strategic interpretation of the displacement rule by LEADER might be appropriate if stimulating an innovation outcome is the goal of LEADER policy towards enterprise.

5. Opportunity/Benefit:

A range of new analysis is available to policy makers concerned with a number of key rural development issues including innovation and development, land use and community development.

6. Dissemination:

Main publications:

Heanue, K. (2008) (Ed) *Embracing Change*, National Rural Development Conference Proceedings, Teagasc Rural Economy Research Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway, ISBN 1-84170-503-9.

Popular publications:

Social Housing Estimates May Fall Short, by Lorna Siggins. Irish Times, January 15th 2007.
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2007/0115/1168460530169.html>

Presentations

Rural Services Research at the Rural Economy Research Centre, *Irish Rural Link Conference, Access to Services-Who Decides?*, Cavan, May 10-11th 2007 (with Karyn Morrissey) (Invited Presentation)

Rural Housing, Sense of Community and Social Capital: An Exploratory Framework for Analysing Sustainability, *Housing Studies Association Annual Conference, Housing and Sustainability*, April 11-13th, 2007, University of York, England (with David Meredith)
<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/hsa/spring07/Papers.htm>

Rural Social Housing Need and Provision, *Irish Rural Link Seminar – Where to Now for Rural Housing?*, Moate, Co. Westmeath, April 9th 2008 (Invited Presentation)

7. Compiled by: Dr. Kevin Heanue